

Total Brand Integration: A Model for Brand Marketing



by Anne Gallagher
and Merry Neitlich



The problem with most brand development and branding in law firms today is not creativity but integration. Too often brands are viewed as mere identity design and not one of a firm's most strategic aspects. An effective brand not only must identify the "essence" of the firm — with both a look and a statement or positioning line describing what the firm stands for — but it must be integrated into the whole of that firm's marketing mix.

The goal is to achieve
"total integration" in a brand program so
that it operates on the highest possible
strategic level and rises to the level
of strategic brand management.

From brochures to direct sales presentations, the brand effort must permeate. If the brand only represents the firm's look but is not carried through in the messages the primary sales force (*i.e.*, the lawyers) brings to meetings with clients and prospects, then the effort is little more than throwing good money out the window.

At our presentation on total brand integration at the LMA's recent annual conference in Orlando, we spoke with Jeffrey Morgan, vice president at American Lawyer Media, about how to integrate a brand effort. We suggested two inter-related steps toward creating a full-brand integrated program: (1) plan with an eye to phasing in a totally integrated program; and (2) understand how to best manage the program by understanding the politics and the processes at the firm.

How Do I Phase in a Brand Program?

In our experience, we typically see three levels in phasing-in a program. The goal is to achieve "total integration" in a brand program so that it operates on the highest possible strategic level and rises to the level of strategic brand management. Of course, every brand program will be unique — but with a concept of structure, every marketing professional at least has a roadmap for assistance.

In this context, it should be clear that every brand program must begin with a brand-development process. This is the means to developing the "essence" of the firm. There are

many ways to do this. From interviewing relevant partners to holding a brand session to employing client or market research, whole volumes can be written on how to develop the firm's brand. Our experience is that a half-day brand session that includes between 12 and 15 people is the most effective, fastest way to develop a brand. (Because this article focuses on integration strategies, not brand development, we welcome your calls or e-mails about brand development. See contact information at the end of this article.)

As a marketing professional, the following checklist can assist you in setting expectations for a brand effort as well as understanding the most common phase-in scenarios:

Basic Brand Program

These elements are the essential components for a basic brand program. We strongly recommend that an initial program incorporate these elements. When they are overlooked, the integrity of the brand program is likely to suffer.

- ✓ Buy-in from attorneys/staff — rationale for the program
- ✓ Brand-development process — identify the positioning line and related brand aspects
- ✓ Concept testing/focus groups of the recommended concept(s)

An effective brand not only must
identify the "essence" of the firm — with
both a look and a statement or positioning
line describing what the firm stands for
— but it must be integrated into the
whole of that firm's marketing mix.

- ✓ Training in the brand for attorneys — to gain a full understanding of its meaning and implications
- ✓ Application of the brand to firm collateral materials

Intermediate Brand Program

Once the basic elements are in place, it is then appropriate to strategically add characteristics into the program.

- ✓ Custom brand elements — such as an internal and/or external brand launch, teaser campaigns, client introductions, etc.
- ✓ Staff training — at this time, it is critical to involve staff (if not previously done) to help them gain a rich

understanding of the brand as well as their role in communicating it in their day-to-day work

- ✓ Seminars/webinars
- ✓ Advertising
- ✓ Firm Web site
- ✓ Firm publications such as newsletters, e-alerts, etc.
- ✓ Speaking engagements
- ✓ Community outreach
- ✓ Firm retreat — to begin to fully integrate the brand, it is helpful to focus all or a portion of a firm retreat on what the brand means in practice and how attorneys can incorporate it into their practice

Total Integration — Strategic Brand Management

At this level, the brand efforts begin to move into the strategic brand-management category. Prior efforts and programs need to be constantly monitored, but these additional elements can be added selectively to fully integrate the brand.

- ✓ Direct mail programs
- ✓ Database marketing — to track and measure brand efforts
- ✓ Practice group marketing
- ✓ Cross-marketing
- ✓ Sponsorships
- ✓ Point-of-purchase (firm lobbies, conference areas, etc.)
- ✓ Client feedback/service programs
- ✓ Responses to requests for proposals
- ✓ Staffing — particularly the addition/appointment of a brand manager(s)
- ✓ Refreshing the brand — after a certain period of time, the foundation of the brand may need to be “refreshed” to identify whether that foundation has changed, modified or developed

How Do I Manage the Process?

Once there is a clear sense of how the program should ultimately look, key issues of how to design and manage the program usually emerge. Many marketers have found the following “10 Steps to Brand Management” helpful as they plan their strategies for creating process and internal buy-in:

Planning to Brand

1. **Plan and Budget.** The first and most critical component is in planning and budgeting for a brand program. Not only must the firm be “ready” to brand, but it must

develop a realistic budget for its program that is both near-term and forward-looking.

2. **Buy-In.** The program is lost if attorney buy-in is not anticipated, contemplated and fostered. For most firms, this is both an art and a science to accomplish well and fully.
3. **Strategic Business Plan Is in Place.** This document provides clear direction for a brand program as well as being a marker of a firm with interests in planning for the future. If this document has not been developed, the brand process is often a good time to discuss it.

Brand in Place

4. **Work with Partners in Small Groups.** Talk with them about how the brand is relevant in their work, in their client interactions, in the internal workings of the firm.
5. **Convene a Brand Committee or Appoint a Brand Manager.** Building a brand cannot be done with a project mentality. It needs the type of focus and attention that a freestanding committee — in conjunction with a brand manager — can bring to it over time.
6. **Baseline Measurement.** One of the “givens” about a brand is the need to measure it, whether in terms of recognition, visibility or some other measure in the marketplace. There is wisdom in conducting a market study — customized to the firm’s needs — that assesses the starting point for a brand.

Advancing the Brand

7. **Track with Marketing Software.** Most decisions need to be made based on data. There are few better ways to collect and analyze information than with marketing software.
8. **Assess.** Maintaining clarity of message, audience focus and implementation strategies requires regular brand assessment.
9. **Brand Management Program.** Continue to think of creating the overall brand program as part of a strategic brand management function, complete with staff and specific and measurable objectives. Let it rise to the level of the chairman’s office in terms of reporting.
10. **Plan and Budget.** Don’t neglect the long-term planning and budgeting aspects of a brand program. If there aren’t new ideas on the table today, then the program is not developing.

Anne Gallagher and Merry Neitlich are partners in Extreme Marketing. They can be reached at anne@extrememarketing.org or merry@extrememarketing.org.